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AUTHOR	Wijetunge, Pradeepa; Willson, Jonathan
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ABSTRACT

This paper defines curriculum development and discusses the curriculum development process. It emphasizes a variety of information that is essential for curriculum developers and policymakers to perform their tasks satisfactorily. A 1998 survey showed that attitudes of students, teachers, and employers toward current Library Information Science (LIS) education programs in Sri Lanka are not favorable, indicating that curriculum developers have not been successful. The information system required by curriculum developers is poor in Sri Lanka for a number of reasons, including dependence on part-time teachers and coordinators, lack of training in curriculum development, difficulty in locating pertinent national information, limited access to international information, and the cost of information. The poor information system has produced a weak LIS education system in the country. Suggestions are made as remedial measures in order to strengthen the information system. (MES)

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Availability of information to LIS curriculum developers and policy makers and the status of LIS education system: the case of an information poor country

Pradeepa Wijetunge
University of Colombo, Colombo
Sri Lanka
Email: pradeepa@eureka.lk

Jonathan Willson
Department of Information and Communications,
Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, UK
Email: j.p.willson@mmu.ac.uk

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Abstract

This paper defines curriculum development and discusses the process of curriculum development. It emphasises a variety of information, which are essential for curriculum developers and the policy makers to perform their task satisfactorily. This information system required by the curriculum developers is poor in Sri Lanka due to a number of reasons. Poor information system has produced a weak LIS education system in the country. The paper finally make suggestions as remedial measures in order to strengthen the information system.

Paper

Current LIS education and training programmes in Sri Lanka

Currently there are two types of LIS education and training programmes in Sri Lanka - academic programmes and professional programmes. Academic programmes include, the three

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tier part time certificate course, General and Special degrees and the Masters programme of University of Kelaniya, Masters programme of University of Colombo and the three tier part time certificate course and the Library Technicians Course conducted by the Sri Lanka Library Association (SLLA). In addition, National Institute of Education conducts a 75-hour module on LIS for teachers. Professional programmes include the Associateship and the Fellowship of the SLLA. Panels of senior librarians handle curriculum Development of these programmes.

Curriculum Development

"Curriculum development is a process whereby the choices of designing a learning experience for students are made and then activated through a set of coordinated activities. Curriculum development for the professional, is a logical process that begins with clear goals and proceeds in an "if-then" manner until finished". (Wiles & Bondi 1993 p.3).

Smith and others (1971) identify two types of curricula - that of common education and that of special education. According to these authors, Common education will be based upon the universal elements of the culture and such aspects of the specialities are of general concern. Special education will be based largely upon the dominant specialities of the culture. It will be designed to train the individual for a particular social or vocational position. In the context of this paper, the term curriculum development (CD) is used in the second sense.

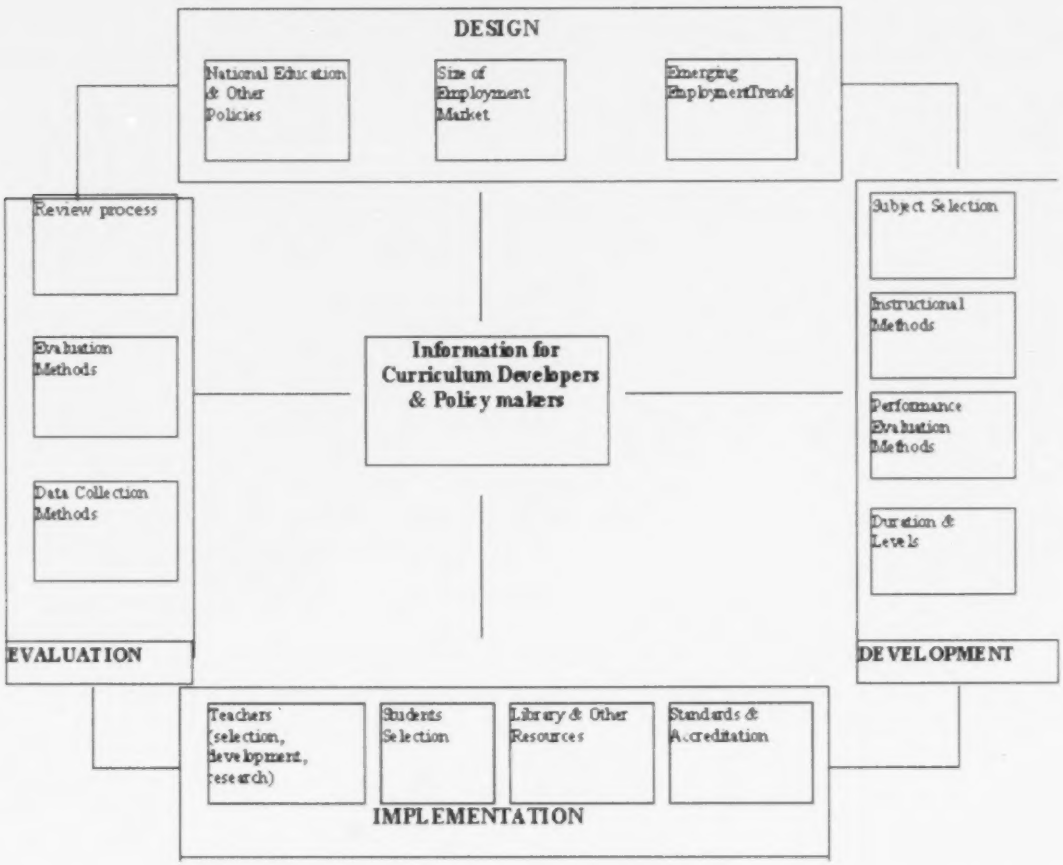
Wiles and Bondi (1993) use the analogy of an architect to explain the CD process. The architect cannot design a home until certain information about style (ranch, colonial, modern) and function (number of bedrooms, special rooms) are known, curriculum planners cannot design a gifted programme until they know the purpose and the intended audience. Over time, the field of curriculum has focused on a cyclical model to guide this process of development: analysis, design, implement and evaluation. (Wiles & Bondi 1993).

Each of these stages requires careful assessment of a multiplicity of conditions, which affect that particular stage. Design stage must consider the national policies which affect the library and information centres, aims and objectives of the LIS education programmes, existing employment market and the emerging trends of employment opportunities. Development stage should concentrate on the subject selection, instructional methods, duration of programmes and levels of programmes (certificate, graduate, postgraduate etc). Implementation stage involves, the selection of teachers and their development, selection of students, library and other facilities, funding sources etc. Evaluation stage must study the effectiveness of the programmes and review the existing programmes to suit the requirements.

Information system of the Curriculum Developers

Curriculum developers (CDs) need to concentrate on all these stages in order to develop a sound curriculum. Curriculum cannot be developed in isolation, but it has to recognise the social, economic, political and technological environment in which, the LIS professionals have to function. CDs must consider the needs of the information environment and the expectations of the LIS employers in designing the education and training programmes. CDs need a variety of information in this endeavour. The following figure depicts the variety of information required by the CDs, in the process of CD.

Figure 1 - Information requirements of LIS curriculum developers and policy makers.



Information System of LIS Curriculum Developers in Sri Lanka and the resulting curriculum

It is doubtful whether LIS CDs of Sri Lanka have had access to all these information. Evaluation of the Sri Lankan LIS education system revealed that, there are several problems related to the curriculum, entry requirements and duration, teaching staff, research and publications, co-ordination, library and other facilities. (Wijetunge & Willson, 1998a). A further survey was conducted in 1998, to measure the attitudes of the students, teachers and employers of LIS professionals in Sri Lanka.

Attitudes of these three categories were measured using two data gathering techniques. Students and teachers were mailed a self-completing postal questionnaire and the employers were interviewed using a pre-defined interview schedule. A representative sample of 175 students was chosen for the survey and there was a 52% response rate. Total LIS teacher population (which is 45) was surveyed and the response rate was 67.5%. A representative sample of employers was approached and 71% were interviewed. Following table summarises the attitudes of students, teachers and employers towards the current courses.

Table 1 - Attitudes of students, teachers and employers towards current LIS education programmes in Sri Lanka

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		Students %	Teachers %	Employers %
1	Admission requirements are good	-	55	20
2	Subject coverage is good	71	66	40
3	More IT knowledge is required	-	-	60
4	Librarians should have a subject knowledge in addition to professional knowledge	-	-	40
5	Personal qualities are not developed by the courses	-	-	60
6	Status of Librarians are low when compared with other professionals of the organisation	-	-	60
7	Course is relevant to the occupation	57	-	-
8	Library and other facilities are satisfactory	28	4	-
9	Student guidance and support is satisfactory	52	44	-
10	Teaching, learning and assessment is satisfactory	20	-	-
11	Employers should be involved in curriculum development	-	-	100

This survey proved that, the attitudes of students, teachers and employers, towards current LIS education programmes are not favourable. Especially the employers have a negative attitude. This negative attitude towards the existing LIS education programmes indicates that the CDs have not been completely successful in their enterprise. Poor information system available for the CDs, policy makers and stake holders of LIS profession in Sri Lanka has created a mismatch between skills provided by the courses and the employment market.

Factors which affect the information system of Curriculum Developers.

There are several factors which contribute to this poor information system A previous study (Wijetunge and Willson, 1998b) indicated that the LIS education system of Sri Lanka mainly depend on part-time teachers and co-ordinators. Those involved, are the cream of the profession who are also involved in numerous other professional activities in addition to teaching and CD. Therefore, CDs cannot devote their full attention to the task. Because they are not full-time teachers or CDs no organisation is responsible for their training in CD. Hence, they lack training in CD. These two factors affect their information seeking behaviour relevant to CD, negatively. Thirdly it is difficult to locate pertinent national information. (National educational policies, current and emerging employment markets for LIS professionals, employer requirements, skills required etc.). Research and publications are extremely limited in the field of LIS. There is no proper co-ordination of other national information sources. A special attempt has to be made spending extra resources to locate the required information. Because of the lack of research and surveys, the threat imposed on the LIS professionals by the changing societal needs are not realised by them. Fourthly access to international information is limited. Access to electronic databases is not readily available on one hand, and access to hard copies of information generated in foreign countries is limited on the other hand. Distance between information generators and the Sri Lankan CDs causes a delay in receiving the current information. Fifthly, cost of information contributes to the poor information system. Even if the distant materials are located, the question of "who pays for the acquisition" is inevitable. High cost of material restricts the selection and acquisition and the greater distance to information means higher freight charges which escalates the cost of information.

Conclusion

To overcome the problem of poor information system, immediate surveys must be undertaken

at national level to assess the requirements of the employers and employment trends. This will enable the CDs to formulate aims and objectives and design programmes to bridge the existing gap between the market requirements and the skills generated. Secondly CDs must be given a training in their venture, so that, they will be able to take a systems approach to CD. When they are aware of the significance of the CD process they will attempt to build up a strong information system to support their assignment. At present, LIS education and training organisations pay attention only to CD, but it is a significant obligation of them to develop the curriculum developers as well as their supporting information system. By this process only, we can move away from the saber - tooth curriculum. (Benjamin, 1971).

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